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THE ANTI-UNION.

PRICE 2D.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1799.

No. XXI.

TO THE PEOPLE OF Ireland.

THE advocates of an Union complain that the question is not fairly discussed—that the voice of reason is drowned in popular clamour—they demand cool, dispassionate enquiry; and they beseech you not to pre-judge them and their system. Are they sincere when they desire you to deliberate and then to decide for yourselves and your posterity? Or do they wish to amuse you into silence, until they shall have decided for you, and in your name, and until all effectual means of prevention shall have passed irrevocably away?

When, how, and by whom, has this measure been proposed, and has it been introduced merely upon its merits, and has it appealed solely to your reason? Try the sincerity of its advocates, and the justness of their complaints, by these simple and fair tests.

As to the time of the measure:—Was it ever known that the period of war was deemed a fit season to embark in laborious and interesting details upon speculative projects of political improvement? How many weeks have elapsed since every man was branded as a republican, who presumed, at such a period, to suggest the slightest change in our constitution? And shall the very men who affixed the brand, themselves without suspicion, now propose, admittedly, the most important innovation that ever was projected in this country? The plea of necessity cannot be resorted to for a discussion, in every respect obviously unreasonable and pernicious. For it is admitted by the ablest and most strenuous advocates of an Union, that its beneficial effects must be slow and gradual; and it is no where contended, that it will pour any sudden balm into our wounds—except, indeed, upon its final rejection; and it is manifest, that even the most temperate discussion of such a subject, must at present open and inflame them.

If then, an Union proposes no immediate and speedy relief from our calamities, and is resorted to merely for its future and distant effects; why, I ask, has the nation, under its present circumstances, been tortured by the discussion? Why was the crisis of agony selected as the moment most propitious to deliberation? Manifestly, my countrymen, that you might not deliberate.

That impudent falsehood might proclaim your assent, while terror and dismay, and perhaps astonishment, at such effrontery, kept you silent.

I am not surprized that those who wished to steal away your constitution, should be shocked and disgusted at the clamour which has been raised against the detected and reprobated fraud. *Stop thief*, are words which are seldom gently or harmoniously articulated; and cannot be expected to sound agreeably in those ears against which they are levelled. I hope, however, notwithstanding the fastidious delicacy of certain persons, that the popular outcry will not suddenly cease; that it will be continued until the knavish project be finally abandoned; or your constitution fully secured against so wicked an aggression.

If the time of the measure be suspicious, is there any counterpoise from the manner in which it was introduced, or the Gentlemen Ushers who introduced it? A measure proposed for the avowed purpose of cementing two nations in a lasting Union of interests and affections, one would have imagined, should have proceeded from the nations themselves. At least popular and respected characters should have recommended it, and the sentiments and feelings of the public been consulted and considered, before any such project was avowed in Parliament. No such process. The measure is decided upon in the British Cabinet. Men of Parliamentary interest in Ireland are commanded to appear at St. James's—not to give their opinions, but to make their terms, and receive their instructions. A pamphlet is written by an Englishman, under the auspices, almost by the dictation, of Government; and circulated gratuitously, and with much industry, through the nation. I am at a loss to know what degree of gratitude we owe for this involuntary service. In this pamphlet (from which the Minister seems to have borrowed all his notions about the state of Ireland) you are pretty plainly told, that you are not fit for liberty; and the Parliament is told that the only atonement it can make for its manifold sins, and wickedness, is by suicide. The author or editor of this performance, is unfortunately too well known to you. Being himself at once cause, proof, and herald, of that profligacy for which he would attaint your Parliament, and extinguish your Constitution; it was, I presume, conceived, that his testimony upon that subject would be conclusive. Our Parliament, thank heaven, has refuted the calumny. But they still owe something to the feelings of an indignant people. It remains to punish it.

But was the measure, announced as it was upon the very eve of its being submitted to Parliament, fairly laid before the public, for calm discussion, even during the

short interval between the time, when it was deemed evidence of a treasonable disposition to impute it to government, and the actual propounding it in Parliament? Have its advocates just grounds for saying it came recommended purely by its intrinsic merit, and appealed solely to the dispassionate and unbiassed understanding of the nation? Have they a right to complain that a free, fair, and disinterested discussion, has not taken place?

One would have imagined, that the terror of that military government, which continues even still to jostle our judges from their seats, was a sufficient impediment to popular meetings not convened by the castle. One would have imagined that the daily trial of men not subject to the mutiny act, for political offences, by court-martial, contrary to every principle of our laws and constitution, and in defiance of the declared and known opinion of the Court of King's Bench, would have operated sufficiently, to have suppressed the public sentiment. It is not uncharitable to presume, that this monstrous and unprecedented jurisdiction, has been continued in use and practice for that purpose, there not being the slightest necessity for so deadly a violation of right, or any other assignable motive for its strange and preposterous continuance. One would imagine that the suspension of the habeas corpus act, the unsparing exercise of the uncontrouled power of government over personal liberty, and the menacing anxiety with which this question has been pressed forward, would have operated sufficiently. But more pointed and direct efforts were deemed necessary. Sheriffs were induced or intimidated to prevent county meetings, and military commanders threaten to disperse all bodies of citizens, who shall treasonably assemble to question the right of an English Minister to inflict upon us the blessings of a Legislative Union.

But has Parliament itself been suffered to discuss this measure with freedom? Most unquestionably not. The Minister has openly exerted the whole patronage of Ireland to induce your Representatives to belie their sentiments and betray their country. The dismissal of officers of the crown, for parliamentary opposition upon ordinary occasions, may at least be reconciled to the recent practice of our constitution. But is this an ordinary occasion, or within the spirit or principle of that practice? A measure proceeds from the Minister, upon which he says he wishes to take the unbiassed sense of Parliament. He assumes the competency of that Parliament, to alter and new-model the whole frame of the Government and Constitution; but admits that the solemn and decisive measure ought not to be carried into effect contrary to the wishes and feelings of the nation; but he again asserts, that the Representative body furnishes a fair criterion of the public sentiment.

Suppose his principles all admitted:—Does it not clearly and incontestibly follow, that upon such an occasion peculiarly, the Representative, even tho' a placeman, should be free and unbiassed? Can he at one and the same time represent the Minister and, his Constituents,

when the avowed purpose of resorting to him is to discover whether the latter agrees in sentiment with the former? Can the Representative fairly communicate either with his own sentiments, or those of the public, when he is imperatively told, that he must forfeit his office, if he differs from the Minister? Is the sacrifice of 3000l. per annum a necessary test of the sincerity of an anti-union member; and is the gain of so much, no imputation upon the honesty and sincerity of his opponent?

The Minister talks of the small majority against the measure:—I venture to assert, that no occurrence ever so astonished him, as that there was any majority—Much as he despises, and loudly as he calumniates, our Parliament, it has furnished him with an example of virtue, upon which, from any thing within his experience, he could not calculate. It is not, however, to his taste. I dare say he calls it Bæotian dullness. Having issued his commands to dismiss every refractory placeman, and to treat with every ductile expectant, he would have reckoned upon a majority, if the measure had been an avowed, and not a disguised annihilation of our trade and constitution.

But does the Minister really believe that only a small majority differed in their hearts from him? He knows in his heart the contrary. He knows that many who voted for him, or for their places, expressed the most decided disapprobation of the measure. His manager here can tell, if he communicates the truth, that the triumph of the treasury bench, at being defeated, could not be disguised. He could command the votes of placemen, but he could not govern their feelings. Many of them openly acknowledge the motive of their compliance. They prefer the lesser to the greater shame.

At a crisis, my countrymen, when so much active and disinterested virtue has been displayed, we ought rather to compassionate, than condemn, the ordinary frailty of human nature. All men are not born to be heroes. I pity the man, who, having no means of support for himself and his family, but the emolument of an office which he has long enjoyed, and filled with character, and who now is suddenly called upon to choose between famine and disgrace. I know that many such men would, in the progress of this business, if it had proceeded, have redeemed their character. I pity the sad necessity under which they acted, and I give credit even to their patriotic wishes, and future intentions. But what shall we say to a *young Lord* who should dictate such terms? Who should *in person*, unfeelingly and imperiously issue the cruel mandate to honorable and reverend age, and exact such a sacrifice from the exquisite feelings of private and domestic virtue. I often thought that a thorough-paced politician was the most cruel and cold-blooded animal in existence. A young, thorough-paced politician, is a rare monster.